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Maire Mullins

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BIRDSONG IN WHITMAN: LISTENING TO THE MOCKINGBIRD IN "OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING"

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In 1859, Whitman was recovering from two great personal losses. His favorite brother Thomas Jefferson Whitman (known as "Jeff") had married Martha E. Mitchell on February 23rd. He missed Jeff's companionship terribly. "What seems clear is that the marriage deprived Walt of his ward and companion and changed the poet's understanding of male friendship," Dennis Berthold and Kenneth Price note in their "Introduction" to their collection of the letters of Thomas Jefferson Whitman.[1] When Whitman accepted a position with the New Orleans *Crescent* eleven years earlier, in 1848, Jeff had travelled to New Orleans with him and worked as an office boy for the paper.[2] The two brothers stayed in New Orleans for three months. Jeff was fourteen at the time and remained close to his brother until his marriage in 1859.[3] Because they had travelled together, Walt and Jeff shared particular memories of a special time in each other's lives, memories that created a special bond between the two of them. In families with many children, it is not unusual for friendships to form among pairs of siblings. When Jeff died in 1890, Whitman wrote, "O, how we loved each other—how many jovial good times we had! . . . . God's blessing on your name and memory, dear brother Jeff!"[4] In addition to the change in his friendship with Jeff due to Jeff's marriage, "a devastating amorous defeat" had occurred in Whitman's personal life sometime in 1857 or 1858.[5] Whitman's relationship with Fred Vaughan, who more than likely had inspired the *Calamus* poems, was coming to an end. There are resonances between the crisis that Whitman records in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and the turmoil and uncertainties captured in the *Calamus* poems.[6] These two painful experiences form the backdrop for the themes of loss and separation in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."

Critics have documented other important influences on the composition of the poem: Whitman's fascination with birds, his rural experiences on Long Island, and his love of the Italian opera.[7] Even as a boy, Whitman was cognizant of birds and watched their activities closely,

especially when he spent time with his grandparents in West Hills, Long Island, then almost totally rural.[8] Whitman may have seen mockingbirds while on his trip to New Orleans in 1848; since the mockingbird is prevalent in the South, it seems likely that he would have had the opportunity to see mockingbirds and to listen to their distinctive song. While mockingbirds were not common on Long Island in the 1850s when Whitman was composing "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," it is possible that Whitman may have observed a pair of mockingbirds there; mockingbirds at this time had been sighted as far north as Maine.[9] In addition to these rural experiences, Whitman's urban experience of regularly attending the opera also contributed to the way he shaped the poem. David Reynolds notes that between 1847 and 1855 Whitman "heard at least sixteen of the major singers who made their New York debuts."[10] Robert D. Faner writes that the song of the mockingbird in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" serves as "a symbol for the song of Alboni, the great contralto who sang in New York in 1852."[11] Gary Schmidgall agrees, describing Maria Alboni as the "progenitor of that overwhelmingly affecting and liberating vocalist, the mocking-bird."[12]

Later titled "A Word Out of the Sea" (1860) and then "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (1871), "A Child's Reminiscence" (1859) examines the process of a young boy's awakening to poetic vocation as he watches and listens to a pair of mockingbirds on the seashore.[13] Five years earlier, in late 1854, Septimus Winner (1827-1902) wrote "Listen to the Mockingbird," a song that became his "best known composition" and one of the most popular songs of the nineteenth century.[14] Told from the viewpoint of a bereaved lover who has lost his mate (named Hally), the song was inspired by Winner's overhearing a young African-American child—who "ran errands" for the music store where he gave lessons—whistle the melody.[15] Because of the subject matter of the song, its widespread popularity, and its use of the mockingbird, this popular song represents a hitherto unrecognized yet significant source for and influence on the composition of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."

Written by Winner under the pseudonym of Alice Hawthorne,[16] "Listen to the Mockingbird" sold over fifteen million copies in the United States and five million copies in Europe. The song is still well-known by many Americans, who recognize the melody and can hum the tune. The song was so popular that the name Hally (also spelled Hallie) became a very popular name for girls in the South in the nineteenth century.[17] Abraham Lincoln described "Listen to the Mockingbird" in the following way: "It is a real song. It is as sincere and sweet as the laughter of a little girl at play."[18] The song became one of Lincoln's favorites. King Edward VII of England attested that he "whistled 'Listen to the Mockingbird' when I was a little boy."[19] Steven H. Cornelius

notes that during the Civil War, Union General Philip Kearney "often gave out whiskey to his band when they played it, which was frequent, at least 'as long as the musician can see his instrument.'"[20]

Born in Philadelphia in 1827, Winner was the seventh child of Joseph Eastburn Winner, a violin maker, and Mary Ann Hawthorne, a relative of Nathaniel Hawthorne. He was talented at the violin, and was able to support himself by teaching music, mostly violin, guitar, and banjo. He married Hannah Jane Guyer in 1847. Beginning in 1848 he kept a diary, but wrote entries sporadically until his death in 1902. His biographer Charles Eugene Claghorn notes that "He would usually buy a diary some time before January 1st of each year, write in it for five or ten days, then drop it for the balance of the year. Sometimes he would pick it up during the year, write several lines in it, grow tired and throw it into discard."[21] In addition to song lyrics, Winner also composed poems, several of which are included in his diaries. His first song, "Let the Light of Days Depart," was composed in 1851; he wrote a single song in 1852 and 1853, respectively, but then wrote seven songs in 1854 and seven songs in 1855. The themes and subject matter of his songs mostly concern home, hearth, mourning, and memories—especially memories of "Mother." One of his diary entries illustrates his sensibility as reflected in his songs: "I don't think I was born for riches tho I'm far from being poor. Well 'all in all' I consider I'm happy as most men, I'm thankful for what I get, and sometimes happy for that which I only anticipate getting, in other words what doesn't come."[22] Most of the songs he wrote in the 1850s are in stanzas of 8 lines, with an 8/6 pattern and consistent rhyme schemes of abababab; "Listen to the Mockingbird" is fairly unusual in its use of a chorus (repeated lines) and, in some versions, a quartet (four singers singing together), although Winner does use a chorus in a few of the other songs he composed in this decade. Winner had experienced modest success with songs prior to "Listen to the Mockingbird." He did not benefit monetarily from writing his popular hit; he sold the copyright for $5.00. When he died in 1902, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote that Winner "had a capacity for seeing how to make music available for the masses that has never been approached by any man in the world."[23]

"Listen to the Mockingbird" is sung from the point of view of a human male lover who is singing over his lost mate Hally's grave, and the song of the mockingbird reminds the lover of his loss. This painful remembrance is called up every spring when the mockingbird reappears and sings. Hally died in September, and the mockingbird was singing then, just as the mockingbird sings every spring since her death. As long as the lover can hear the mockingbird singing, Hally will never be forgotten.[24] The lyrics can be read on the nineteenth-century songsheet

on the back cover. The structure of the song is three main stanzas sung by the solo singer, interspersed with the chorus stanzas. The chorus stanzas are exactly the same, but can be sung by different groups of singers. The song is set in the South ("When we gather'd in the cotton side by side") and the speaker remembers specifically the month of September (Whitman's "Ninth-month"). "The Quaker designation for September may here suggest the human cycle of fertility and birth, in contrast with 'sterile sands' in the next line," the editors of the Norton *Leaves of Grass* suggest, but it is possible that Whitman was directly borrowing the month used in "Listen to the Mockingbird."[25] In Winner's song the word "remember" is repeated four times, then rhymed with "September" which is also repeated four times.

"Listen to the Mockingbird" is a memory song, just as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is a memory poem; both texts focus on mourning and loss. The mocking bird in Winner's song sings "on the bough" in the spring; Whitman commences his "reminiscence" in September but after the first sentence (22 lines long), the poem takes place in spring, "When the lilac-scent was in the air and the Fifth-month grass was growing."[26] Winner's song alternates between the chorus, sung by more than one voice, and the solo voice, sung by the solo singer—in this case, the male who remembers the loss of "sweet Hally." The pairing of solo and group singing as a way of performing music became popular in America in the early 1900s, as David Reynolds notes; it was a particularly "American phenomenon.[27]

Whitman may well have modeled the boy's intense act of listening to the mockingbird on the lines of the chorus from "Listen to the Mockingbird," which exhorts the hearer to attend to the song of the mockingbird:

> Listen to the mocking bird,
> Listen to the mocking bird,
> The mocking bird still singing o'er her grave.
> Listen to the mocking bird,
> Listen to the mocking bird,
> Still singing where the weeping willows wave.[28]

In Whitman's poem, the "grave" is the ocean, and the male mockingbird searches in vain for his mate as the young boy watches. In Winner's song, the mockingbird perches on the "weeping willows," which "wave"—much like the "white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing" in "Out of the Cradle" (*LG* 1892, 198). The young boy in Whitman's poem, watching the lone mockingbird call for his mate, "Listen'd long and long./Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,/Following you my brother" (*LG* 1892, 198). Listening and attentiveness are

qualities that are cultivated over time; the young boy visits the seashore "all summer," listening as the lone mockingbird searches for his mate and sings a series of fruitless appeals for her return (*LG* 1892, 197).

The prevalence of popular songs in America can be traced back to the seventeenth century, but the method of distribution remained the same over the centuries. David Ewen writes, "Popular songs in the colonies were first distributed through broadsides: a sheet containing some newly written verses, the work of a local poet, usually on a subject of topical or local interest, intended to be sung to a familiar tune."[29] "Listen to the Mockingbird" was distributed and sold in just this way. The editors of *America Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets* describe the way the widespread use of the printing press allowed for greater dissemination of popular song sheets:

> The proliferation of the mechanized printing press coincided with a period of expanding industrialization, immigration, and commerce in America. The relative ease and low cost of producing song sheets met the demand of a nation eager for a means of expression. By the height of their popularity, song sheets could be found almost everywhere. They were distributed in town squares, taverns, homes, and around camp fires. They are evidence of a country desiring to be heard, as well as to listen.[30]

That Whitman was influenced by popular music as well as by opera underscores David S. Reynolds's point that "in the carnivalized atmosphere of antebellum America rigid cultural hierarchies did not yet exist. Now-familiar separations between high, popular, and middlebrow culture would not begin to solidify until after the Civil War…Before the war, there was a fluid exchange between different cultural idioms."[31] As the self-described poet of America, Whitman wanted to infuse all aspects of American experience into *Leaves of Grass*.

Four years later, in the fall of 1863, Whitman met John Burroughs, who would become one of the most acclaimed naturalists of the late nineteenth century. Burroughs was working in Washington D.C. as a clerk in the Department of Treasury at the same time that Whitman was working part-time in the office of the army paymaster; they were introduced to each other by a mutual friend. "I have always patted myself on the back for seeing the greatness of Whitman from the first day that I read a line of his. I was bewildered and disturbed by some things, but I saw enough to satisfy me of his greatness," Burroughs writes.[32] The two friends would occasionally take long walks in the countryside, and, as Joseph Kastner explains, "the two would watch birds, Burroughs identifying and talking about them while Whitman, who was a constant note-taker, jotted down Burroughs' remarks."[33] Later, Burroughs described Whitman's talent for capturing birdsong in this way:

Aside from this sonnet, the mockingbird has got into poetical literature, so far as I know, in only one notable instance. . . . I refer to Walt Whitman's 'Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,' in which the mockingbird plays a part. The poet's treatment of the bird is entirely ideal and eminently characteristic. That is to say, it is altogether poetical and not at all ornithological; yet it contains a rendering or free translation of a birdsong—the nocturne of the mockingbird, singing and calling through the night for its lost mate—that I consider quite unmatched in our literature.[34]

A close review of the different versions of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" reveals the influence of Burroughs on Whitman's revisions to the birdsong section of the poem. Earlier, Whitman had incorporated many changes to the text of the poem between the 1859 *Saturday Press* version and the 1860 *Leaves* version; for instance, he deleted some words (for example, "and the moonbeams," line 6) but added other phrases (most significantly, the last three lines of the first long section, "I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,/Taking all hints to use them—but swiftly leaping beyond them,/A reminiscence sing") (*LG* 1860, 270).

The 1867 version of the poem, however, contains the most significant changes to the birdsong sections. Whitman adds a third repetition of the opening word for portions of the italicized birdsong. In the following citations, the underlined words are the ones that Whitman added: "*Shine! shine! shine!*"; "*Blow! blow! blow!*"; "*Soothe! soothe! soothe!*"; "*Loud! loud! loud!*"; "*Land, land, O land!*"; "*O throat! O trembling throat!*" (*LG* 1867, 200-203). Whitman may have done so because he had obtained a more accurate ear for birdsong due to his friendship with Burroughs; the mockingbird sings using a repeated trio of sounds, and then varies the trio, as Whitman does in the 1867 revision to the poem. In the 1867 version Whitman also incorporates the repetition of phrases or words within lines: "*This gentle call is for you, my love, for you*"; "*That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray*"); "*O all – and I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night*"; "*O past! O life! O Songs of Joy!*" (*LG* 1867, 203-204). Whitman had captured birdsong successfully in the earlier versions of the poem, but these revisions underscore the ways in which his friendship with Burroughs deepened his understanding of birdsong. He now listened differently and more accurately to the mockingbird; the trio pattern of sound throughout the sections of the poems where he was imitating birdsong directly reveals the extent of this influence. In 1867, he added semicolons to the poem but removed them in 1871, perhaps in order to give the poem more fluency. He may have added the semicolons initially in order to capture the staccato nature of the mockingbird's song. The specific details that Whitman includes about the birds and their habits are accurate (for instance, the four light-green eggs "spotted with brown" [*LG* 1867, 200]), despite

his later disclaimers that he was not an ornithologist and Burroughs's description of the poem as "not at all ornithological."[35]

David Allen Sibley, author of *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, describes the song of the mockingbird in this way:

> Song of varied phrases in regimented series: each phrase repeated two to six times, then an obvious pause followed by a different series *krrDEE-krrDEE-krrDEE, jeurrdi jeurrdi, jeurrdi* …; most phrases musical; many imitations of other species. Call a harsh, dry *chak*; harsher and longer than blackbirds; aggressive call a high, wheezy *skeeh*.[36]

The male mockingbird sings, usually in an effort to attract a mate. The mockingbird repeats the songs of other birds, but it also weaves them together to create a new song each time it sings, a song comprised of all of the songs it has heard but also a song unique to each particular mockingbird. In his observations and recordings of the Northern Mockingbird, known as *Mimus Polyglottos*, or "many-tongued mimic," Donald Kroodsma notes that the bird he recorded delivered, "in a total of 26 minutes' singing time . . . to the best of my counting ability, 465 songs. That's about 18 songs each minute . . . The kestrel sound occurred on 5 occasions; the nuthatch, 9; the cardinal, 5; wren call, 3; kingfisher rattle, 5; mockingbird begging call, 8; machine gun, 2."[37] The mockingbird does not follow a rigid pattern of repeated sounds but rather, as Kroodsma's recording shows, varies the repeated sounds each time he sings. Kroodsma estimated that the particular mockingbird he observed had a repertoire of about 100 different songs; other "mockingbird fanatics" have noted up to 200 songs. The number of songs varies each year, because "males increase their vocabulary size from one year to the next."[38] Given this, it is not surprising, then, that after 1859 Whitman perhaps perceived the mockingbird as a model for his method of poetic accumulation (the catalog technique, for instance, relies on repetition, accrual, and short bursts of captured images) and composition (like the mockingbird, each year Whitman added more poems to subsequent editions of *Leaves of Grass*); in its melodic persistence, the distinctly American mockingbird cannot be ignored by those who hear its song.[39]

Given the largely negative reception of the first and second editions of *Leaves of Grass*, it is not surprising that Whitman wrote a note preceding the publication of "A Child's Reminiscence" in the *Saturday Press*:

> Like the 'Leaves of Grass,' the purport of this wild and plaintive song, well enveloped, and eluding definition, is positive and unquestionable, like the effect of music. The piece will bear reading many times—perhaps, indeed, only comes forth, as from recesses, by many repetitions.[40]

In this review, Whitman alludes to the song of the mockingbird in its natural habitat, which "comes forth, as from recesses, by many repeti-

tions." It is noteworthy too that Whitman blends the description of the mockingbird's method of singing with a reference to "the effect of music"; perhaps he had in mind the popular song "Listen to the Mockingbird" as he was writing the review. Whitman chose the mockingbird, then, as the vehicle and central actor (aside from the boy) in the poem for many reasons, but perhaps in part because the mockingbird puts together its song by stringing together the songs of other birds, producing an incessant stream of melody that is at once imitative and innovative, nearly overwhelming in its insistent repetition. Five years later, in the middle of a notebook entry on the Hermit Thrush, Whitman briefly described the mockingbird's song as "a wonderful intellectual music," which suggests that Whitman sensed in the song of the mockingbird qualities that simultaneously sustained and uplifted the mind and spirit of the listener.[41] Speaking more generally of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," Howard Nelson writes, "In it, the strands are fewer—the ocean shore, an early experience with mockingbirds, later experience of loss and grief and a new sense of self—and their weaving is more dramatic, elaborate, and anguished. But the basic process is the same: a weaving of elements into one self, one song."[42] Like the mockingbird, Whitman weaves disparate elements into "one self, one song," and one book—*Leaves of Grass*.

In Winner's song, the reason for Hally's death is not given. It is sudden, unexpected, and untimely, similar to the death of the female mockingbird in Whitman's poem:

> Till of a sudden,
> May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,
> One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
> Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,
> Nor ever appear'd again. (*LG* 1892, 197)

In the song, the mockingbird sings unceasingly, just as the mockingbird in Whitman's poem sings unceasingly, "All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,/Down almost amid the slapping waves" (*LG* 1892, 198). The mockingbird's insistent grouping of notes, strung together in an incessant barrage of sound, is translated into poetry in the longer italicized birdsong of "A Child's Reminiscence." This song, comprised of sixty-two lines altogether, takes place at night under a "*low-hanging moon*." In the poem, the solitary male mockingbird sings out of grief for the loss of its mate, focusing first on the winds, then the waves, the moon, the sea, and the night. The bird calls to its mate, then turns again to the land and the stars, listening intently for a response, but ending its song with "*together no more*" (*LG* 1892, 200). This second, longer song, is broken into smaller sections, divided by the repetition of

three words that begins each medley: "Soothe! soothe! soothe!"; "Loud! loud! loud!": and "Land! land! O land!" (*LG* 1892, 198-199). After this short repetitive burst, the bird's song is broken into medleys that are comprised of the bird's incessant longing for its lost mate. There is no mention of what will happen to the nest or the eggs; without the female mockingbird to help tend them, surely the eggs will not hatch. The initial promise of fertility that the eggs seemed to presage is overturned; thus, the death of the female mockingbird also signifies the death of her offspring. Mockingbirds can express in their songs the loss of a mate, but this expression is not prolonged and would not last for months. Lutwack notes that "pair-bonded birds do indeed recognize the absence of a mate and do make persistent calling and searching efforts to restore contact, though hardly over a period of months, as the poet claims. A short time after the disappearance of its mate, even a monogamous male bird, like the mockingbird, will resume singing in order to attract a new mate."[43] The mockingbird's song thus has a dual purpose: to restore contact with the lost mate if possible, but if not, to attract a new mate so that the mating ritual can begin again. In the poem, the boy perceives that the mockingbird has lost his mate, and imposes his understanding of loss on the way the bird's song is translated into language. The way Whitman transcribes the mockingbird's song becomes inflected by the boy's perception of loss.

Whitman's choice of the mockingbird as the primary focus of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" reveals a telling shift in his perception of his role as poet. In the late 1850s Whitman was overcoming the apparent loss of his friendship with his brother Jeff and was facing overwhelming difficulties in his relationship with Fred Vaughan. The sound of the mockingbird's call, reiterative, strong, unceasing, became a model for his own persistence as he came closer to the publication of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. At this crucial moment in his poetic career Whitman not only heard the song of the mockingbird, he listened to it and recorded it in one of his most masterful poems. Influenced by a popular American song that also used the mockingbird's music as the mournful sound reminding the listener of a lost mate, Whitman captured the sorrow that he felt by translating that sense of loss into poetry. Clearly popular music, then, was every bit as important as opera when we think of formative influences on "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." Whitman's friendship with John Burroughs helped him to recast some of the birdsong lyrics so that the song of the mockingbird was more accurately rendered, but Septimus Winner's "Listen to the Mockingbird" provided Whitman with the initial impetus he needed to merge birdsong with poetry.

Pepperdine University

NOTES

1 Dennis Berthold and Kenneth M. Price, "Introduction," *Dear Brother Walt: The Letters of Thomas Jefferson Whitman* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1984), xix. Hereafter, *Dear Brother Walt*.

2 Jeff wrote to his mother: "My work is good and light. I have such a part of the mail (and I can do it most over night) and then I have nothing to do for the rest of the day." (Jeff Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, New Orleans, March 27, 1848), as cited in *Dear Brother Walt*, 9. The nature of their friendship can be discerned in the way Jeff describes one of the ways they spent time together: "Just a little farther up town there is a canal. . . . Along by this canal . . . there is a road called shell road where we take frequent (and very pleasant) walks, the road is nearly as hard as a brick, and on a pleasant afternoon is covered with carriages of every description," (Jeff Whitman to his parents, New Orleans April 23, 1848), cited in *Dear Brother Walt*, 11.

3 Whitman also found Jeff's piano playing inspiring, and perhaps composed poetry while Jeff played. In this notebook entry, Whitman uses bird imagery to describe his creative process: "Flocks of ideas beat their countless wings and clutch their feet upon me, as I sit nearby where my brother is practicing at the piano." *Daybooks and Notebooks*, ed. William White, 3 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 3:765.

4 Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892*, ed. Floyd Stovall, 2 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2: 693.

5 Gary Schmidgall, *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 179. Hereafter, *A Gay Life*.

6 See Charley Shively, *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working Class Camerados* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1987) and Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), for discussions of Whitman's relationship with Fred Vaughan. Just as with the *Calamus* poems, Whitman poured his pain and sense of loss into the song of the mockingbird, finding solace in giving voice to the bird's loss. Gay Wilson Allen writes "The reader today will see at once a similarity in tone, theme, and some of the imagery to 'Calamus-Leaves,' but of course in the 1860 edition those twelve poems were scattered," *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman* (University of Chicago Press, 1955), 233. Hereafter, *Solitary Singer*.

7 For studies of the sources of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," see Leo Spitzer, "Explication de Texte Applied to Walt Whitman's Poem 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,'" *ELH* 16 (September 1949), 229-249, hereafter, "Explication"; and Michael Vande Berg, "'Taking All Hints to Use Them': The Sources of 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 2 (Spring 1985), 1-20. For studies of Whitman's incorporation/translation of birdsong into human language, see M. Jimmie Killingsworth, "'As if the beasts spoke': The Animal / Animist / Animated Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 28 (Summer/Fall 2010), 19-35; Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Thomas C. Gannon, "Complaints from the Spotted Hawk: Flights and Feathers in Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass*," in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*, eds. Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 141-75.

8 Whitman writes, "Hours, days, in my Long Island youth and early manhood, I haunted the shores of Rockaway or Coney Island, or away east to the Hamptons or Montauk." From "Comments 1855-1892" in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed.

Michael Moon (New York: Norton, 2002), 786. Hereafter, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Gay Wilson Allen notes, "Walt visited his grandparents at every opportunity, in all seasons, not only for their companionship but also because he loved Long Island and the surrounding ocean," *Solitary Singer*, 15.

9 See Leonard Lutwack, *Birds in Literature*, for a discussion of bird migration patterns along the Atlantic coast (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 67. Hereafter, *Birds in Literature*.

10 David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 189. Hereafter, *Walt Whitman's America*.

11 Robert D. Faner sees the structure of the poem as "operatic in method, with its opening song of ecstatic love, its central lyric of waiting, and its final outburst of passionate grief," *Walt Whitman & Opera* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1951), 87-88.

12 Schmidgall, *A Gay Life*, 179. Both Schmidgall and Faner overlook the importance of the respective roles of the mockingbirds in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"; this is of central significance in understanding the manner in which birdsong functions in the poem. If Maria Alboni were indeed the "progenitor" of the female mockingbird, then birdsong would comprise only a small part of the poem—a total of nine lines before the female mockingbird dies. Rather than the female, it is the *male* mockingbird that plays the central role in the poem. The male bird's experience of loss and the manner in which he gives voice to that loss inspires the young boy who witnesses the painful separation of the pair of mockingbirds, and who hears and records the incessant mourning of the male mockingbird. Rather than Maria Alboni, it is more than likely that when Whitman was composing the operatic sequences in the poem, he had in mind the voice of the Italian tenor Allesandro Bettini, whose performances often moved Whitman to "tears." In "Letters from Paumanok, Number 3," Whitman describes the voice of Allesandro Bettini in the following way: "His voice has often affected me to tears. Its clear, firm, wonderfully exalting notes, filling and expanding away; dwelling like a poised lark up in heaven; have made my very soul tremble.... [N]one have thoroughly satisfied, overwhelmed me, but this man. Never before did I realize what an indescribable volume of delight the recesses of the soul can bear from the sound of the honied perfection of the human voice. The manly voice it must be, too. The female organ, however curious and high, is but as the pleasant moonlight." *The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, ed. Emory Holloway (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1972), 1:257. See also Donald Barlow Stauffer, "Opera and Opera Singers," *The Walt Whitman Encyclopedia*, ed. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland, 1998), 484-486.

13 The poem was originally published in the December 24, 1859 issue of the *Saturday Press*, a weekly newspaper published by Whitman's friend Henry Clapp, Jr. For an overview of the manner in which Whitman published some of his poems first in periodicals, and a copy of the original publication of "A Child's Reminiscence" in the *Saturday Press*, see Susan Belasco, "Walt Whitman's Poems in Periodicals," *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

14 Charles Eugene Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird: The Life and Diary of Its Author, Sep. Winner* (Philadelphia: The Magee Press, 1937), 28. Hereafter, *The Mocking Bird*.

15 The child's name was Dick Milburn. Claghorn notes, "Dick Milburn, who was known as 'Whistling Dick,' had been a beggar, collecting pennies, nickels and dimes from persons on the streets of Philadelphia, while he whistled and played upon his

guitar. At various times he imitated the warble of the mockingbird, and on one of these occasions Winner heard him and was attracted by the pleasantness of the tune," *The Mocking Bird,* 29.

16 See Benjamin Robert Tubb, "The Music of Septimus Winner," pdmusic.org/winner.html (accessed August 8, 2011) for a list of the songs he composed. See http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/winners.html for a more complete biography of Winner.

17 Claghorn notes that "Many southern ladies . . . can thank this song for the fact that their given name is Hally. Their mothers and fathers sang the old song, and when the doctor said 'It's a girl,' they just naturally agreed upon calling the baby girl Hally" (31).

18 As cited in Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird,* 30.

19 Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird*, 30.

20 Stephen H. Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 89.

21 Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird*, 5.

22 As cited in Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird*, 10.

23 As cited in Claghorn, *The Mocking Bird*, 59.

24 For one version of a sound recording, see "Listen to the Mockingbird" on the Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project website, Northern Illinois University Libraries (lincoln.lib.niu.edu/Songs/mockingbird.html). For a whistled recording of the song and for other published versions see the Library of Congress American Memory website, memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html; search "Septimus Winner."

25 Moon, ed. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings,* 207n2.

26 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1892), 197. Hereafter, *LG* 1892. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

27 Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 183.

28 Alice Hawthorne (Septimus Winner), "Listen to the Mockingbird." Book and Special Collections Division, *America Singing: Song Sheets*. Hereafter "Mockingbird."

29 David Ewen, *All the Years of American Popular Music* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 5.

30 See the Library of Congress website, "America Singing: Nineteenth Century Songsheets," memory.loc.gov/ammem/amsshtml/amssabt.html.

31 Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 155.

32 John Burroughs, *The Last Harvest* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 254.

33 Joseph Kastner, *A World of Watchers* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 171.

34 John Burroughs, *The Writings of John Burroughs*, 23 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 3: 12-13.

35 Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett point out that Whitman's revisions of this section of the poem in subsequent versions improved the birdsong lyrics, "especially the characteristic reiteration of phrase, the varied vocalic modulation of the cadences,

and the staccato 'twittering' accentuation,'" *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 208n4.

36 David Allen Sibley, *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 411.

37 Donald Kroodsma, *The Singing Life of Birds: The Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 71-73. Hereafter, *Singing Life*.

38 Kroodsma, *Singing Life*, 73.

39 Leo Spitzer categorizes the poem as a distinctly American "ode": "Out of the Cradle" is in the form of an Ode, a poetic genre that "celebrates an event significant for the community. . . . Whitman has acclimated the ode on American soil and democratized it. . . . he did away with *all* mythology, pagan as well as Christian. He replaces the pagan Pantheon by the deified eternal forces of nature to which any American of today may feel close" ("Explication" 247-248).

40 Moon, ed. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 206n1. Amanda A. Gailey notes that references to Whitman appeared in the *Saturday Review* forty-six times in the next year; indeed, "the poet's collaboration with this editor [Henry Clapp, Jr.] assisted in shaping a public persona that differed from the *Leaves of Grass* Whitman of 1856," "Editing Whitman and Dickinson: Print and Digital Representations" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska Lincoln, 2006), 41.

41 Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984) 2:766.

42 Howard Nelson, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006), 500.

43 Lutwack, *Birds in Literature*, 68.